

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, July 11, 1897, with transcript

COPY Auditorium Hotel, Chicago. July 11th, 1897. My darling little wife:

Mr McCurdy and Susie have gone off to "The Bismark" a celebrated "Bier Garden" here, and I have now a quiet hour to think of twenty years ago, and my dear little bride.

How clearly it all comes back to me, the beginning of a new life for you and for me. I wish dear I could be worthy of all the love and devotion you have shown to me, of all the happiness you have brought to me. Of late years it seems as though we were always fated to be separated from one another on our wedding day. These summer Conventions come at the wrong time. Before reaching Milwaukee I was much worried over my Address. I had it so much on the brain that I could not write to you, and since then I have been completely prostrated with the dreadful heat that have been so fatal in Chicago and Milwaukee.

A thunder storm last night has cleared the air, and I am enjoying the cool breezes from the lake that steal in at the open window.

My Address seems to have given satisfaction to all our friends here, and seems also to have been satisfactory to my audience. The close attention of the vast congregation, showed that I was heard by all, and the cries of "Go on" when I was about to stop displayed an interest in the subject that was as gratifying as it was

The earlier speakers were unable to make themselves heard and the audience had to be frequently called to order by the Presideent. The speaker who immediately preceded me not only had difficulty in making himself heard, but occupied about twice his allotted time At last he was called to order by voices from the audience and promised to occupy only two minutes more, which he interpreted as ten! My time was thus cut short, and I

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started to address a hot, tired, and exasperated audience. It was therefore with peculiar gratification that I found myself able to hold their attention and interest them, and the cries of "Go on" showed that they wanted more, and not less of what I had to say. Susie, (who had a seat upon the platform) attracted great attention. She was the only girl there, and it was whispered around that she was Helen Keller!

The meetings of "The round table for teachers of the deaf" was well attended by the N.E.A. members. We must have had an audience of 700 or 800 people, most of them with notebooks in their hands, jotting down points that interested them.

Mr Warren Robinson, (a deaf man) read a paper 3 on Manual Training, which brought Mr Spencer to his feet in antagonistic mood, and almost precipitated a fight between Mr Spencer and Mr Swiler, on the supposed advantages possessed by Institutions over day-schools in the matter of Manual training.

In the absence of Miss Fuller or any representative of her school, I said a few words for "The Horace Mann School and Manual training", and Prof. Gordon (who presided) closed the discussion with oil poured plentifully upon the troubled waters.

I was much struck by the fact that the institutions arguments, seemed to produce little impression upon the audience and I now realize, as I never realized before, the importance to day schools, of their teachers affiliating with the members of the N.E.A. These are all teachers in day-schools for ordinary children, and the stock arguments of institution teachers, are, by them, unconsciously applied to hearing children and seem to be fallacious. Their sympathies are more for teachers of day-schools than for those of boarding-schools. Hence the very great importance to the day-schools for the deaf of affiliation of their teachers with the members of the N.E.A.

The permanent "Living of speech-teaching carried on in the M.E. church, was thronged with visitors all day long, and I have no doubt will be remembered 4 by most teachers, as the most interesting feature of the N.E.A. meeting. Miss Garrett had made arrangements

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to bring her whole school to Milwaukee, but, at the last moment, was prevented by a most extraordinary accident.

The bill for the support of her school (which had passed both House and Senate) mysteriously disappeared on its way to the Governor! Without the Governor's signature it fails to become a Law. The Legislature has adjourned and will not meet again for two years so that the matter cannot be easily remedied, and poor Miss Garrett's school is left without support for two years to come. In spite of this, she sent up one teacher (Miss Reinhardt) with one child.

There were no lack of deaf babies however, for Miss McCowen, and the Chicago schools together with the Wisconsin schools were able to keep a continual supply of pupils and classes.

The general failure of institutions and sign-schools to send pupils brought the oral system prominently forward. All the schools of the country were invited to participate and the preponderance of oral pupils was due to the failure of sign-schools to take advantage of the opportunity to impress public-school teacher's and not to any action of the committee in charge of the matter.

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The interest of the N.E.A. has been so strongly aroused that a permanent department (department No 16) has been for "teachers of the deaf, blind and feeble-minded".

They refused a department for the deaf alone, and wanted one for "the defective classes". The round Table for teachers of the deaf objected to the designation "defective classes" and proposed "special classes" or "classes requiring special methods of instruction".

The directors of the N.E.A. would not admit this because the vagueness of the designation, might be held to include "Kinder-garten", "Physical culture" and all sorts of special instruction. They respected the wishes of the round table in regard to "defectives" however

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and finally compromised on “teachers of the deaf, blind and feeble-minded”. As no teachers of the blind or feeble-minded have yet appeared, the organization is entirely of teachers of the deaf, for the present at least.

I don't remember the names of all the officers, but Prof. Gordon is President, and two ladies were given positions (Mrs Crane and Mrs Holden) Mrs Crane and Miss McCowen were first nominated, but Miss McCowen withdrew so as not to have two from Chicago.

Mr Jones, Supt. of the Ohio institution was also made an officer. Two, perhaps three more names completed the list of officers. I think Mr Spencer was one, but not sure.

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I noticed at the meeting the following heads of schools.

1. Dr J.C.Goodwin, Supt. of Illonis Inst. (Chairman)
2. Miss McCowan, Supt. of Chicago day-schools.
3. Mr Clarke, Supt. of Michigan Inst.
4. Miss Donohue, Principal of Detroit school.
5. Mr Tate, Supt. of Minn Inst.
6. Miss Brown, Principal of Minneapolis school.
7. Mr Swiler, Supt. of Wisconsin school.
8. Miss Wettstein, Milwaukee school.
9. Mrs Holden, Osbkosh.
10. Wanson.

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11. all the Wisconsin schools. Mainette.

12.

13. Forgot the names.

Mr Westervelt, Supt of Rochester school.

Mr Currier, Supt of New York Inst.

Mr Johnson, Supt. of Indiana Inst.

Mr Jones, Supt of Ohio Inst.

Miss Reinhardt, (of the Garrett Home)

The schools of Wisconsin and Chicago were well represented, with a sprinkling of other schools.

No teachers present from the New England States.

Have just time for a bi-carbonate of soda bath before train starts for Detroit. Terrible condition with prickly heat, never had such an attack before. Out of 7 order all over, inside as well as outside, vomiting and, weak as anything, longing for home.

Will stop at Brantford to see Carrie, and at

Bridge to let Susie see the falls of Niagara. Will try to go the rest of the way by water. Steamer Niagara to Toronto. Then down river to Montreal, or steamer to Sydney. Hope the latter may prove feasible. Love to my father and Miss Fuller, Elsie, Daisy, and your dear self.

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Your loving husband, Alec.